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Getting SMART rolling

The Sonoma-Marín Area Rail Transit is finally moving forward with action by the Sonoma-Marín Area Rail Transit board, approving the purchase of rail cars and phasing of the project.

Last Wednesday, I was sitting in the audience listening to the Metropolitan Transportation Authority advising the SMART board on various issues. It was clear to me that MTC was supporting the project, giving a major lift to the train.

The first phase of the 70-mile project is from Santa Rosa to downtown San Rafael. It is interesting to note that many of the employees working in Marin live in Sonoma County. Over the past years, large employers such as Fireman's Fund), Autodesk and the county have polled their employees and many indicated their desire to take the train, thus avoiding the horrible Highway 101 commute.

Some say don't build the train project but put more buses on the highway, but the commute problem won't go away with that.

In fact, the Golden Gate Transit did have more Sonoma-Marín buses on the highway and because ridership was not there, it reduced the number of runs. Also, the thought of using the existing railroad bed is impractical, because freight trains will be using the same tracks.

Widening the road between Novato and Petaluma also is problematic because it would mean building the project in sensitive wetlands. Providing an alternative mode of transportation will provide the commuter a quicker and more hassle free way.

There is no question in my mind that phasing this project will show to the naysayers that it will work and as funding becomes available the final section of the 70 miles: San Rafael to Larkspur, Santa Rosa to Windsor and finally to Cloverdale will be completed.

Thank you Marin Independent Journal editorial board for your Dec. 19 editorial, "SMART board gets good news, cautionary advice."

Hooray, hooray, the train is on the way!

J. Dietrich Stroeh, Novato